

International Fixers



by Harry Amies

Say Iran. Do most people think of CGI outsourcing, VFX and a multi-million dollar movie industry? If Harry

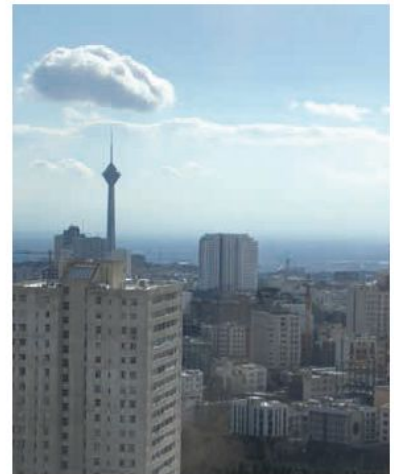
Amies and Amir Rezazadeh of UK based co-producers HarryAmir have anything to do with it they probably would.

HarryAmir is a UK-based company, that helps international productions, co-productions and post companies to work in Iran. Run by Brit Harry Amies and Iranian Amir Rezazadeh they act as a bridge and introductions service to create partnerships between independent companies in Iran and the western world. They help their clients overcome political nerves, meet the right people, secure deals and build trust on both sides.

An excerpt from a normal commissioning meeting for us goes like this:

“OK let’s do it” says the commissioner, “Great!” - I say, trying not to audibly whoop... “So – what’s next?”

“First of all we need to know everything about you, your full detailed histories, where you were born, how you met, who you’ve worked for, how you got here, as much detail



as you can, this’ll have to be cleared at the top... and I’ll need to make sure neither of you are spies...”, the commissioner pauses “...actually I’ve no idea how I’ll do that.”.

Even when working in TV, the medium of the devil, if the commissioner suspects you’re working directly with Beelzebub himself, expect a careful risk assessment.

Being suspected as agents from the dark side is, quite understandably, the impression we seem to give when we first speak to companies in the UK. The perception, and the suspicion of Iran so total, that when you suggest the idea of filming there - with it’s world famous Oscar winning writers, directors and crews - people tend to look at you like your are actually insane.

But after the election in Iran last year of President Rouhani – an Iranian premier who has been working hand over fist to present a completely different face of Iran to the world. My partner/

co-producer Amir, a London-based Iranian, and I, decided that if that was the policy – and from our experience within the country, it is definitely the hope of the people we work with – that we were in a great position to support that.

So, at the beginning of 2014 – we decided to take the bull by the horns, stick our neck out – and start a company HarryAmir (harryamir.com) to help support Iranian and international film and media companies who wanted to collaborate and co-produce.

But you may wonder, why – and how does someone from Britain end up working in Iran?

Although Amir lives principally in London now, we met at the Fajr Film Festival in Tehran – Iran’s main annual film festival. However I first went to Iran – believe it or not – on a holiday with my partner, back in Christmas 2011.

Leila's parents, both white-British had lived there before the revolution, and had a great love for the country. She was born after they left, but she had been on a trip with her mum once before – so she swore it was nice... So, I asked, should I ignore government advice which was basically to NEVER GO THERE?

On top of it all, the British embassy had been raided three weeks before – but having already paid for the visas and the tickets – we decided we shouldn't be put off by a skirmish. Another thing, I'm six-foot-six, have blond hair and a ginger complexion – should blend in fine then, I thought.

I remember coming in to land in Tehran for the first time and being quietly glad that I'd put all my affairs in order back home, said goodbye to my family, left the cat-flap open – as I was convinced – I was going to spend the next four years chained to a radiator... if I was lucky.

Shuffling into the short "Foreigners" queue at immigration, I stepped forward to the Iranian official at the immigration desk, and handed over my passport. "Ah British?" he looked at the passport. He didn't need to look at me – I knew he was looking into my dark colonial soul. A bead of sweat trickled down my forehead. Flick, flick, flick, flick – pause – flick, flick. Stamp. Stamp. He grinned. "Welcome in Iran." He smiled and waved me on. I think I somewhat reeled over the red line into Iran. Just a cheery welcome - was that it?

In fact my abiding memory of that trip was of incredibly warm welcome. People were thoroughly apologetic about the embassy, paying for our bus and taxi fares, inviting us into their homes.

I became instantly fascinated by a country that seemed to be so dramatically different to my prior picture of it. As someone producing film and TV you are always trying to get under the skin, find the reasons behind things, grab characters and stories, things that have been lingering in the dark and bring them out into the light.

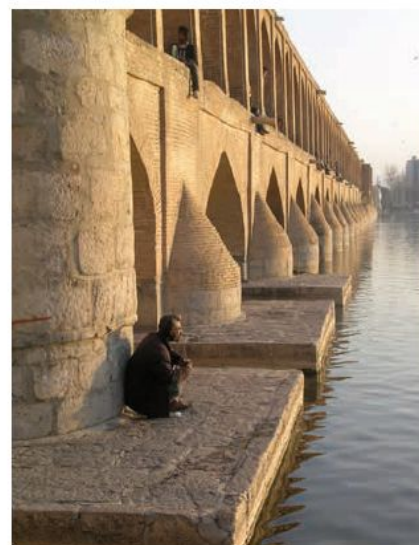
So from that moment I wanted to make a documentary there, I started researching the history and gradually began developing contacts in Iran. It was on my next trip to Tehran that I met Amir at Iran's Fajr International Film Festival.

Amir it turned out, lived down the road from me in London, so back in town we got to know each other and started working together on research for the documentary. Having built up a good trust through all our work together, we became aware also, that we were in quite a unique position. A dual nationality partnership, with a foot in both camps, we weren't aware of anyone else connecting up the media and film businesses in both countries but we could see both had much to offer each other.

The creative talents within Iran have been famed for centuries. Once they were exclusively employed creating the finest silk carpets in the world. Today they're not just artisans, they're directors, musicians, composers, 3d modellers, game designers. Its exchange rate is furiously competitive, and it may come as a surprise to learn, Iran has just shot its biggest budget movie to date, directed by Majid Majidi – a film of the Prophet Mohammed's life weighing in at \$150m. Besides this it makes around 70 nationally funded features each year. Iranians believe in film.

In the first few months of this year, we have already had constructive meetings with many senior figures in the main government organisations that cover the creative industries, who have been vocally supportive of our work, including the Deputy of Cinema in Iran, the Deputy of Farabi Foundation (BFI equivalent), International Director of Soreh, International Deputy of IRIB, and the Head of Visual Media Arts.

In tandem we have good relationships with numerous indies, game producers, animation studios, post houses, manufacturers, 35mm rc helicopter companies (Arri 235 in



an rc chopper anyone?). We also have strong relationships with many independent (and famous) Iranian film directors and producers.

Things are on the move in Iran. We're supporting a number of UK based companies on their productions in Iran, including documentaries and travelogs. We've had constructive discussions with producers even at the BBC, at major international news outlets based in the UK, and with UK government departments that cover creative media and import-exports, they know us and we work transparently with them.

If you want to make a film in Iran, or out-source – we can help. To Amir as someone who has grown up there, and me as an outsider, Iran is a treasure trove of talent, places and stories. It's had a lid on for years, so we've made it our business to bring them out.

harryamir.com

